



## South Dakota Department of the Military South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



### SDDVA HOSTS MINI CONFERENCES

County and Tribal Veterans Service Officers participated in training this week conducted by the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. The training programs were held in Rapid City, Pierre and Brookings.

SDDVA Field Officer Kevin Swanson and SDDVA State Veterans Service Officer Don Thomson briefed the CTVSOs on pension, VA Choice—Healthcare, Virtual VA, Share Map D, VVNS, VBMS and new VA forms that will be coming out in 2015.

Andrea Kramer, Business Manager, and Dani Sexton, Accountant, at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home, briefed participants on the new admission process at the State Veterans Home and reviewed the new admission forms that will be utilized.

Deputy Secretary Pollard thanked all the CTVSOs for their support of Operation RAV phone campaign and for hosting the open houses.



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Heroes Among Us—showcasing 125 South Dakota veterans.



## HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM SDDM SECRETARY

Happy Holidays!

This time of the year is typically one of great joy with families reuniting to celebrate the holidays. The holidays will be especially joyful this year for the South Dakota National Guard because for the first time since 2001, none of our airmen or soldiers is serving in a combat zone.

The South Dakota National Guard was proud to respond to emergencies here at home again this year. We had 114 soldiers & airmen engaged in flood preparation efforts June 17-20 in south-eastern South Dakota and 259 individuals providing tornado response in Wessington Springs June 18-26.

We conducted our welcome home ceremony for the 1742<sup>nd</sup> Transportation Company in October following a 10-month deployment to Afghanistan. Thankfully we performed that mission, and both of our in-state deployments without loss of life or serious injury.

It is with great pride that I congratulate our 114<sup>th</sup> Fighter Wing for being selected as the top overall National Guard flying unit in the nation and recipient of the 2014 Spaatz Trophy. This achievement when coupled with the 153<sup>rd</sup> Engineer Battalion's selection for the Reckord

Trophy as the Army Guard's top battalion-sized unit in the nation plus twelve Army Guard units earning the Superior Unit Award puts an exclamation point on what many would consider the most outstanding training year in the SD National Guard's recent history!

The South Dakota National Guard continues to be respected as one of the very best organizations in the nation because of the high standards set by our soldiers and airmen. I wish each of you the happiest of holiday seasons. Thank you for your continued dedication to our great state and nation!

Timothy A. Reisch  
Major General, SDNG  
The Adjutant General





## HOLIDAY MESSAGE FROM SDDVA SECRETARY

With the hustle-and-bustle of the holiday season, it is important to reflect on the many blessings we have in our lives. While we are busy shopping, wrapping gifts, decorating, and baking, let Christmas serve as an important reminder of just how blessed we are and how fortunate we are to live in a country where we are free to celebrate. Let us remember those who have secured that freedom for us.

Marjorie Holmes once said, "At Christmas, all roads lead home." That's not always true when you serve in the military. Although South Dakota currently does not have any guard members deployed, we do have active duty personnel that will be away from home this holiday season.

Have you ever thought about –

- How many million pounds of fudge and peanut brittle have been shipped overseas to our heroes?
- How many millions of cookies have been shipped over the years to our heroes?
- How many family holiday photos were taken in July when their hero was home on leave?
- How many Christmas celebrations were held in August to accommodate someone's leave?

Only those who have served or have had a loved one serve, can understand what the holidays are like when there are deployments.

As the holidays approach, I catch myself singing "Oh Come All Ye Faithful," and those that are fortunate enough to hear me sing will lean over and say "Hum it Larry, just hum it!" Ok, I get it I'm not the world's best singer, but can I help it if I'm festive and appreciative of all that I have.

We are blessed to have men and women who have served both in war and peace time.

We are blessed to have families that support our heroes and their mission.

We are blessed to have veteran's service organizations and county and tribal veterans service officers that serve as resources to guide veterans through their benefits.

We are blessed to have VA facilities positioned throughout this state.

We are blessed to have a dedicated and talented team of experts at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs that stand ready and committed to assist our veterans.

As you and your family gather this holiday season, please keep our heroes, past and present in your hearts. God bless our veterans, their families, and our troops that are currently serving in harm's way.

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



## SOLDIER TAKEN HOME

Soldiers have a creed. That creed, in part, makes four simple, declaratory statements:

I will always place the mission first  
I will never accept defeat  
I will never quit  
I will never leave a fallen comrade.

I will never leave a fallen comrade was exhibited Tuesday of this week, when SDDVA staff and friends gathered at the Black Hills National Cemetery to bury Veteran Harold Eugene Smith.

Mr. Smith was brought to the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs office in Sioux Falls after his remains were abandoned at a storage facility in Sioux Falls. After some research, SDDVA Claims Examiner Erin Brown found the story of Harold E. Smith.

Harold Eugene Smith was born on December 17, 1934, in New York, NY and died on February 19, 1985, at Saint Vincent Hospital in Manhattan, New York. He died at the age of 50 due to cancer.

Mr. Smith joined the United States Navy on November 10, 1954, in New York, NY. He reached the rank of SN and worked as a deck hand. He was discharged on October 31, 1956. Harry was married to Shirley Smith and worked at Maher Terminal( shipyard) as a security guard. At the time of his passing he was living in North Bergen, NJ.

SDDVA would like to thank Srey Austin and her staff at the Black Hills National Cemetery for all their hard work to ensure Mr.

Smith was laid to rest with military honors. . We would also like to thank Arvid Mellund and the Sturgis Honor Guard for providing funeral honors.

Memories of our veterans and their sacrifices can never fade. We must not forget. America must not forget.

L to R—Arvid Mellund, Ken Irwin (Custer CVSO), Danix Sexton and Andrea Kramer (MJFSVH), and Erin Brown, SDDVA)





## HEROES AMONG US

Service Organizations in South Dakota  
Air Force Sergeants Association  
American Legion  
American Legion Auxiliary  
28TH Bomb Wing Retiree Activity Office (RAO)  
Disabled American Veterans  
Disabled American Veterans Auxiliary  
14th Flight, Order of Daedalians  
Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America  
Korean War Veterans Association  
Marine Corps League  
Military Officers Association of America  
Military Order of the Purple Heart  
National American Indian Veterans Inc.  
Paralyzed Veterans of America  
South Dakota National Guard Enlisted Association  
South Dakota National Guard Enlisted Association Auxiliary  
South Dakota National Guard Officers Association  
The Retired Enlisted Association  
U.S. Submarine Veterans Inc.  
Veterans of Foreign Wars  
Veterans of Foreign Wars Auxiliary  
Vietnam Veterans of America  
World War I Auxiliary



For the past twelve months we have been showcasing heroes among us in celebration of the state's 125th anniversary of statehood.

There is a large group of heroes that have dedicated their energies to improving the lives of veterans and their families. These heroes are the veterans service organizations.

"Veterans Service Organizations are the backbone of veterans rights for our state and nation," said SDDVA Secretary Larry Zimmerman. "As an old N.C.O, all organizations understand this analogy. VSOs strive tirelessly to improve the lives of veterans and their families."

In addition to the numerous service organizations in South Dakota, two other entities that dedicate their efforts to assist veterans are the South Dakota Veterans Council and the South Dakota Veterans Commission.

Collectively all of these groups provide advocacy, educate veterans on benefits, lobby congress and legislators and provide a network for veterans.

Thank you Service organizations for your continued support and your dedication to enhance the lives of our veterans.

## NATIONAL GUARD VOLUNTEERS ORGANIZING WINTER CLOTHING DRIVE

Volunteer members of the South Dakota National Guard are organizing a winter clothing drive through the month of December to benefit needy individuals located in the communities in which they serve.

New or gently used coats, gloves, hats, scarves or blankets – for adults and children – are being donated by Guard members to help the most impoverished individuals who are in need of warm clothing this winter season. The clothing drive is not limited to only volunteer members of the Guard, but is intended as a community activity.

Members of the public who would like to help donate items are encouraged to bring winter clothing items to any Army National Guard armory throughout the state or to the Air National Guard base in Sioux Falls by Dec. 31.

Collected items will be delivered to a variety of local social service organizations in January for distribution to those in need.

The all-volunteer effort to collect winter clothing items, while not an official function of the National Guard, is a welcome adjunct activity showcasing volunteers' commitment to serve some of South Dakota's most needy people.

A list of armory locations to donate winter clothing items is posted on page 7. For more information, please contact the local National Guard in your community.



## STATE VETERANS HOME BRIGHTEST IN HOT SPRINGS PARADE OF LIGHTS



Coming or going, the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home (SVH) entry in the Hot Springs Parade of Lights, shined brightly! So it was no surprise when they were awarded the "BRIGHTEST" float award. The annual Hot Springs parade of

lights event is sponsored by the Christmas in the Hills Committee and Black Hills Power and Light.

Staging and judging of the parade is done at the SVH to allow veterans and spouses to see all the entries.



## SDNG CLOTHING DRIVE DROP LOCATIONS

Aberdeen Armory 115 South Roosevelt Street Aberdeen, SD 57401-5205 605-626-2270	Madison Armory 1302 N. Washington Ave. Madison, SD 57042-0030 605-256-5287	Sioux Falls Armory 801 West National Guard Dr. Sioux Falls, SD 57104-0117 605-357-2973
Belle Fourche Armory 1202 Lawrence Street Belle Fourche, SD 57717-0489 605-892-4346	Milbank Armory 1001 East Park Avenue Milbank, SD 57252-0510 605-432-4671	Sioux Falls – Joe Foss Field 1201 West Algonquian St. Sioux Falls, SD 57104-0264 605-988-5700
Brookings Readiness Center 300 5th Street South Brookings, SD 57006-3319 605-696-5400	Mitchell Armory 5501 Airport Road Mitchell, SD 57301-0610 605-995-1671	Spearfish Armory 1200 University Street Spearfish, SD 57783-0520 605-642-6121
Chamberlain Armory 202 East Kellam Street Chamberlain, SD 57325-0496 605-734-5441	Mobridge Armory 1014 Airport Road Mobridge, SD 57601-0328 605-845-2301	Sturgis Armory 12930 Highway 34 East Sturgis, SD 57785-0549 605-737-6400
De Smet Armory 403 3rd Street Southwest De Smet, SD 57231-0057 605-854-3762	Parkston Armory 102B South Chapman Drive Parkston, SD 57366-2017 605-928-3420	Vermillion Armory 603 Princeton Street Vermillion, SD 57069-0434 605-677-6787
Flandreau Armory 710 West Community Drive Flandreau, SD 57028-1061 605-997-2661	Pierre Armory 3440 East Highway 34 Pierre, SD 57501-0938 605-773-3449	Wagner Armory 600 East Highway 46 Wagner, SD 57380-9417 605-384-3657
Fort Meade 54 Sheridan Road, Bldg. 60 Fort Meade, SD 57741-0317 605-737-6456	Rapid City – Camp Rapid 2823 West Main Street Rapid City, SD 57702-8186 605-737-6200	Watertown Readiness Center 1951 N. Hwy 20 Watertown, SD 57201-3048 605-882-9327
Huron Armory 1030 3rd Street Southwest Huron, SD 57350-0829 605-352-0200	Rapid City–Range Rd Armory 3740 Range Road Rapid City, SD 57702-8186 605-737-6322	Yankton Armory 204 West 31st Street Yankton, SD 57078-0071 605-688-3045



## DARRACH AWARDED MEDAL OF VALOR

A South Dakota National Guard Soldier was awarded the SDNG Medal for Valor Saturday, Dec. 6, for heroism displayed while assisting a victim in a fatal car crash.

Sgt. Nathan Darrach, of Sturgis, was presented the award for taking action to ensure the safety of others involved in a three-vehicle accident along Interstate 90, near Summerset, Feb. 8.

Darrach witnessed the collision and immediately stopped to assist those involved.

"I just reacted. I was raised to help someone when they're in need," said Darrach. "I knew I needed to do whatever I could to help anyone that was injured."

Darrach rushed to check on one of the victims, Darrol Birk, 59, of Rapid City, who suffered a severe injury and whose vehicle started on fire.

"Sgt. Darrach came to my truck, assisted me and checked out my injuries. My right foot was badly injured and I couldn't get out of my truck, which caught fire," said Birk. "An unknown man also came to assist after checking on a woman in another vehicle whom he reported didn't survive the crash."

According to Birk, Darrach and the unidentified person, forced open the badly damaged door on the vehicle and assisted him to safety. Darrach continued to evaluate Birk for injuries until medical professionals arrived, he said.

"I want to thank Sgt. Darrach for being there and for caring for his fellow man enough to risk his own safety to assist me in my time of need," said Birk, a retired U.S. Army first sergeant and 21-year veteran. "This was a great act of kindness and needed aid on the part of both men at the site of a very violent crash. He is the kind of Soldier I would want with me in combat, knowing he would risk his safety to help his fellow Soldier and man."

"It feels good to help anyone, no matter what the situation is," said Darrach. "All of our training in the National Guard has made it easier to put myself in harm's way to help others."

"It feels great to have had the chance to help Mr. Birk and knowing that his recovery is going well," continued Darrach. "I wish there was something that could have been done for the other driver."

Darrach, a member of Joint Force Headquarters in Rapid City, was presented the award in front Birk and his fellow Soldiers during a unit drill assembly. The award was presented by Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch, the adjutant general of the SDNG.

The SDNG Medal for Valor is awarded to any individual who, while a member of the SDNG, distinguishes themselves by heroism - not involving actual conflict with an armed enemy - while in the Armed Forces of the United States and performing normal civilian functions and/or duties.

"There is no doubt in my mind that everyone else wearing this uniform would have done the same thing," said Darrach. "I just happened to be in the right place at the right time."





## ABERDEEN TO HOST MEMORIAL TO HONOR VETERANS

On Sunday, December 14<sup>th</sup> at 2 pm, Sunset Memorial Gardens in Aberdeen, SD will be holding their annual Holiday Service in the Mausoleum.

The purpose of the service, which is open to the public, is to take time out of our busy holiday seasonal activities to remember and include those special loved ones who are no longer with us.

The program offers songs and a message of healing along with a special tribute to our nation's service personnel.

In keeping with the Wreaths Across America program, service personnel participate in helping to place wreaths on Veteran Memorials at the cemetery. Refreshments are served following the program.



## 90TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The 90th Session of the South Dakota Legislature will convene at approximately 1:00 pm on Tuesday, January 13, 2015, with Governor Dugaard's State of the State Address. This year's session is scheduled for 39 legislative days, with the main run concluding March 13. March 30 is reserved for considering gubernatorial vetoes.

Legislative actions can be viewed at:

[http://legis.sd.gov/Legislative\\_Session/Default.aspx?Session=Ninetieth&cookieCheck=true](http://legis.sd.gov/Legislative_Session/Default.aspx?Session=Ninetieth&cookieCheck=true)

Legislative bills can be tracked or monitored at:

[http://legis.sd.gov/Legislative\\_Session/Bills/](http://legis.sd.gov/Legislative_Session/Bills/)

Live broadcasts of legislative actions and committee meetings are provided by South Dakota Public Broadcasting at: [http://legis.sd.gov/Legislative\\_Session/Media/rss.aspx](http://legis.sd.gov/Legislative_Session/Media/rss.aspx)



# MISSION BLITZ



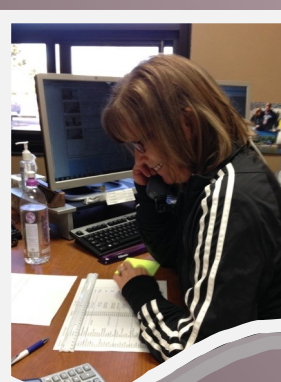
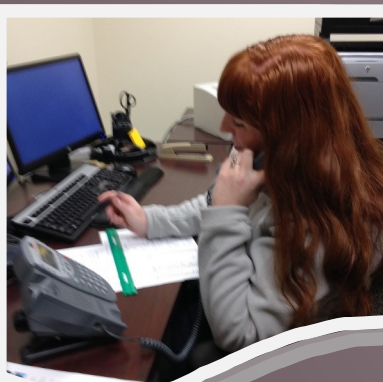
The Pennington County Health and Human Services Department assists with many different programs and services. They look at accomplishing tasks as a team and come up with fun ideas to get these projects accomplished, hence Operation RAV Blitz Day.

Last Thursday was Operation RAV "Blitz Day" in Pennington County. Barry Tice, Director of Health and Human Services; Veterans Service Officer Neal Lutke; Veteran Benefit Caseworker Jamie Guffey; administrative staff from the Health and Human Services Department; and SDDVA Field Officer William Huffmon divided the list and set on their mission to complete the list.

"There are multiple reasons why Operation RAV is a good thing," said Director Tice. "First, we get the chance to personally thank veterans for their service. RAV provides an opportunity to ensure that veterans and their family members have obtained or are accessing all of the VA benefits that are available. If they haven't accessed the benefits, we can determine what the next steps are to ensure benefits are obtained."

"We enjoy the opportunity to partner with the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs in an effort to Reach All Veterans," said Tice. "Pennington County continuously looks for ways to educate veterans on the benefits that are available to them. Operation RAV provided us the opportunity to have conversations with veterans and their family members regarding their benefits."

"It was great to team up with our partners at Pennington County," said SDDVA Field Officer Huffmon! A team of 7 dedicating the entire day to contacting their veterans epitomizes the care and concern it has for their veterans." "We have an obligation at all levels of veteran services to thank our veterans for the sacrifices they have made and to ensure in every possible aspect that their needs are being met," said Huffmon. "Today was a joint continuing effort to do just that!"





# Upcoming Events

## 2014

Dec. 13—Black Hills National Cemetery Wreath Laying Ceremony to Honor Veterans

## 2015

Jan. 5—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am

Jan. 13—Governor's State of the State Address—Pierre—1:00 pm

Jan. 27—Aberdeen Stand Down—Bethany Lutheran Church—1620 Milwaukee Ave SE—1:00—6:00 pm

Jan. 29—SDDVA/Veterans Council Legislative Breakfast

Feb. 2—VFW Legislative Reception—AmericInn—Fort Pierre

Feb. 3—American Legion Legislative Reception—Post 8 Legion Cabin—Pierre

Feb. 6—Women Veterans Wellness Retreat—DAV—Sioux Falls

Feb. 6-8—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Watertown

Feb. 21—Lee Greenwood Valentines for Veterans Concert—Sioux Falls Pavilion

Apr. 6—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am

Jul. 6—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am

Oct. 9—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am

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